

# Indiana House of Representatives

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## News and Information

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## LETTERS TO MY FATHER AND MY FUTURE SON

Indianapolis—State Rep. Vernon G. Smith (D-Gary) initiated a special project for the African American Achievers Youth Corps., Inc. (AAAYC) when the members met during the regular Saturday mentoring meeting on the eve of Father's Day. The project was to write a letter to one's father and to one's son. However, none of the young men live with their biological fathers and none have sons.

Dr. Smith, who heads the group, is an education professor at Indiana University-Northwest. He said the idea was to compare the letters that each young man wrote by looking at the feelings toward the absent father and the feelings toward a future son.

"It really was remarkable to read these letters," said Dr. Smith. "One could witness the longing these boys had for a relationship with their fathers. Some had an understandable amount of bitterness if the father had little contact with the son. However, in the letters to their future sons, these same young men talk about the responsibility and love they will have for their sons. They obviously want to nurture their future offspring and provide positive, life examples to help the future sons grow into manhood without experiencing the hardships of a life without a male role model. It was a fantastic exercise and an eye-opener for all of us."

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The group will travel to the Six Flags Great America amusement park next weekend. Because of their outstanding letters, two of the youth were awarded \$25 gift certificate to spend at the park. Dr. Smith founded the AAAYC in 1993, the same year he authored the bill that established the Indiana Commission on the Social Status of Black Males., which studies social, economic, employment and educational issues affecting contemporary African American men.

"The African American Achievers Youth Corps., Inc. puts theories the Commission discusses into action," explained Dr. Smith. "It is extremely difficult to grow up as a Black male in the inner city, especially if there are no role models to pattern one's life after. I believe the Youth Corps. offers these young men a direction and guidance in setting their personal goals. After reading these letters, I believe we have helped these young men find a path toward responsibility and achievement that will guide their footsteps throughout their lives."

Dr. Smith said the AAAYC mentoring meetings take place in I.U.-Northwest's Hawthorn Hall in Room 219 at 1 p.m. on Saturdays for an hour, followed by an hour of basketball. The group focuses on a variety of topics, including male responsibility, attitude, self-esteem, and health issues.

All young, African-American males are welcome to attend and participate. Parents, youth and agencies may contact Dr. Smith for additional information about AAAYC. His home telephone number is 219-887-2046.

